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ABSTRACT

An attributional model that conceptualizes the pressures that reduce professors' personal and career vitality is presented. The model is based primarily on the locus of control literature and especially the reformulated model of learned helplessness by Lynn Abramson, Martin Seligman, and John Teasdale. The analysis deals only with the cognitive component in conceptualizing aspects of mild, subclinical depression likely to be experienced by professors. It is suggested that self-devaluing perceptions from the basis of feelings of learned helplessness or uncontrollability. Perceived loss of control may be linked to decreased numbers of students enrolling in one's courses, a feeling of malaise about one's discipline, or a felt loss of prestige from peers. It is proposed that crises or states of imbalance in the lives of adults can serve as viable bases for future development, and that efforts to enhance development should be structured to enable individuals to use crises as opportunities for growth. Such growth may be conceptualized as restructured perceptions of causes, or attributions, of uncontrollability. It is recommended that a number of institutional policies that could be examined in view of the attributional model include: early retirement, employment after retirement, leaves without pay, sabbaticals, off-campus consulting, and "growth contracting" or "professional development plans." (SW)

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A COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

CAREER VITALITY OF PROFESSORS:
A COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING MODEL

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Professors face a variety of economic, institutional, and professional pressures which reduce their personal and career vitality. An attributional model is presented which conceptualizes these pressures and suggests various resolutions. The model is based primarily on the locus of control literature and especially the reformulated model of learned helplessness by Lynn Abramson, Martin Seligman and John Teasdale.

Professors face a variety of economic, demographic, institutional and professional threats to their vitality as teachers and scholars. The nature of their training may predispose them to perceptions of high levels of personal, internal control. The paper draws on the locus of control literature and the reformulated hypothesis of learned helplessness to conceptualize reductions in controllability among people accustomed to rather substantial levels of control. Recommendations for enhancing career vitality are suggested which derive from this discussion based on attributional assumptions.

Sources of Career Stress Among Academics

The pervasive nature of lowered vitality and morale among professors has been rather widely discussed. Burton Wheeler (1978) described the despair among faculty and their sense of hopelessness. He argued that the vitality of the university is clearly linked to the vitality of its professors. Following extensive interviews with five hundred faculty and administrators at twenty well-respected liberal arts colleges, William Nelson (1981) sounds a clear call for renewal of the teacher-scholar in a

time where many stresses are taking their toll on the professor. Additionally, Todd Furniss (1981) describes many options for redefining the faculty career to deal with these pressures.

These observers document the following sources of tension for the professor: fewer entry positions for junior faculty, decreased mobility for senior faculty, declining enrollments, fewer curricular changes and new ideas from relatively stable faculties, retrenchment, faculty collective bargaining, lower-than-desired salary increases in the face of high inflation rates, and perceptions of being locked into stagnant job settings. Nelson (1981) vividly portrays pressures generating real tensions when the professor seeks to carry out the dual roles of teacher and scholar, thus "tarnishing the teacher-scholar model". He cites one college president's concern for faculty when the president described college teaching as "the depressed profession for the next ten to fifteen years." Nelson uses the phrase "individualization of the professorite" to describe the diminished group interaction and decreased colleagueship among professors. Adding to all these pressures is the faculty perception supported by administrative acknowledgment that in most colleges "standards and expectations for faculty have risen in recent years". (Nelson, 1981, p. 13)

This concern for the professor as a professional takes on an increased significance when focusing on the academic as a person. Defining quality of life for the individual has received considerable attention over the past decade. Flanagan's (1980) monumental study of this quality of life construct indicates that one of the best predictors of overall quality of life is the degree to which the persons' needs and wants are met by their work. George Albee (1980) argues that "lack of joy in work" is one of the most

serious problems of any industrial society.

Controllability - Locus of Control

This career stress clearly suggests some central elements of depression or controllability in understanding and assisting the professor. Beck (1974) argues that stress causes the "hyperactivation" of primitive, automatic, rigid, cognitive assumptions in the individual. Once initiated these depressogenic thought patterns have a persevering quality of leading to systematic distortion in perception and interpretation of one's experience, capabilities, and future, as well as the motivational and emotional signs of depression. Most clinical definitions of depression combine this cognitive component with an emotional component (fatigue and limited affective expression) and a behavioral component (initiative deficit, reduced output, less attention to detail, etc.).

This paper will deal only with the cognitive component in conceptualizing aspects of mild, sub-clinical depression likely to be experienced by professors.

Two major constructs related to the cognitive element of depression which have received considerable experimentation and theorizing are the topics of locus of control (cf. Rotter, 1975) and learned helplessness (cf. Seligman, 1975).

Locus of control, or perception of control, appears to be a useful concept in conceptualizing high achieving individuals such as professors. Those people have enjoyed substantial success in their training through exerting the considerable personal control necessary for graduate school success. Wilson (1979) notes that perceived lack of control is an important essential across the literature of depression among adults.

There is little, if any, one-to-one relationship between actual and perceived control. Behavioral competence does not necessarily insure high self-efficacy or perceived control. For example a depressed person may seem to function competently to observers but suffer from overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. The cognitive processing of efficacy information from performance is easily distorted by the individual (Wilson, 1979). Or, as Seligman (1975) has suggested, the person believes significant life events are beyond personal control - i.e. helpless. Perceived control has little direct linkage with actual or potential control. Beck (1974) has developed a cognitive - behavioral treatment method which is demonstrably effective in reducing depression (e.g. Rush, Beck, Kovacs & Holon, 1977). In Socratic fashion, clients are encouraged to prove to themselves the inaccuracy and inappropriateness of their negative cognitions relative, largely, to perceived lack of control.

Lefcourt (1979), Phares (1976), and Rotter (1966) have summarized a great deal of research demonstrating that when people adopt the expectancy that they do <u>not</u> control the occurence of reinforcement, they will generalize less from their past and will increasingly fail to use expertise to develop better strategies, or more accurate expectancies, for dealing with current pressures.

Some evidence would support the assumption that professors may tend to be more internally oriented than the general population. Academic achievement of internals is substantially superior to achievement of externals (Procuik & Breen, 1975). However, the pressures of higher education may be viewed as factors pushing professors toward externality. Langer (1979) argues that "illusions of incompetence" are produced by forced relinquishing of control. The highly internal person may be particularly vulnerable to the

pressures of restricted personal influence, job instability, and other institutionally generated tensions. Erroneous beliefs in incompetence result.

Another "illusion" has been suggested from the work on subjective judgements of control. In certain situations people exhibit "illusions of control" (Langer, 1975) and act as if objectively uncontrollable events were, in fact, controllable. Langer (1975) demonstrated that when factors typically associated with skill situations (e.g. competition, choice, practice, control and so on) are introduced into situations in which events are objectively uncontrollable, subjects' expectancies of personal success are inappropriately higher than objective probabilities would suggest. (See Alloy and Abramson, 1982, for a review of several studies of this phenomenon). Professors may presume unrealistically high levels of influence in their environment.

Success in one career track can, rather paradoxically, lead to a sense of uncontrollability relative to "what might have been" in other career areas. Sarason (1977) has pointed out that many people in high status roles are indeed satisfied with their jobs. Because they are doing so well they would not allow that they are dissatisfied. However, they can be dissatisfied because in a mobile society offering many options they have developed many competencies and have promised themselves they would do many things. To have achieved competency in one occupational role leaves them dissatisfied with that one role.

George Albee (1980) advocates a competency model in understanding adults which views the individual functioning in and through a web of social linkages. He conceptualizes competency, among other factors, as a function of controllability.

> Competent persons are turned into incompetent persons as a result of social and economic forces outside of their control. (pg. 97)

Over the last 20 years considerable research on controllability has grown out of Rotter's locus of control construct (cf. Rotter, 1975). As mentioned earlier, professors may likely be more "internally" controlled than the general population given their high levels of individual achievement. While much of the literature on Rotter's locus of control construct tends to view internality as the desirable mode, there is evidence internals may be particularly vulnerable to some stressful situations (Gilbert & Mangelsdorff, 1979; Stebbins & Stone, 1977). The high level of perceived control which professors may have enjoyed in obtaining their education and utilized in the work place may predispose them to unrealistic notions of environmental control and self-control. Rotter (1975) has argued that there is probably a curvilinear relationship between locus of control and adjustment. Individuals in the middle of the I-E continuum may have fewer difficulties in dealing with stressful events than individuals falling at either end of the continuum.

Some further suggestions of the usefulness of the internal-external constructs for viewing the professors' environment can be made. Factor analytic studies suggest these constructs may be composed of notions about the justness, political responsiveness, and predictability of one's surroundings (Collins, 1974; Duffy, Shiflett, & Downey, 1977). The academic environment may be particularly unique in terms of valuing these dimensions.

The professor's perceptual framework can be understood by these expectations of outcome - i.e. belief that a certain outcome results from a particular action. However, a more basic set of assumptions involves the individual's subjective estimate that he or she has the capacity to cope success-

fully. This belief system involves judgements of the likelihood that one can organize and execute given courses of action required to deal with prospective situations. The judgements people make about their capabilities have been studied by Bandura (1982) under the rubric of self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy reflects the individual's subjective estimate that he or she can deal successfully with a threatening situation. Self-judged efficacy is hypothesized to play a major part in the initiation, generalization, and maintenance of coping behavior.

Given the nature of stresses in the academic environment which are to varying degrees outside the control of the individual it becomes obvious that the perceived efficacy of the professor's capacity to handle challenges may be reduced. Self-judged efficacy determines how much effort people will expend, how long they will cope in the face of aversive experiences, and the vigor of their efforts (Bandura, 1982). The reduction of felt stress in the career setting may begin as the individual enjoys an enhanced expectation of successfully executing behavior necessary for professional competence.

Depression - Learned Helplessness

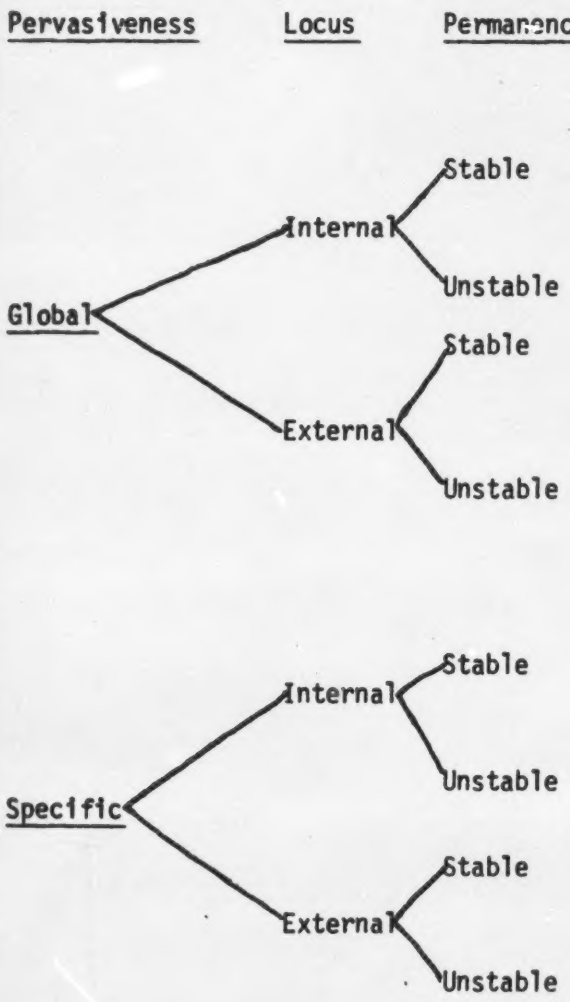
The other major cognitive component of depression comes from Seligman's (1975) learned helplessness theory. The revised, or "reformulated," hypothesis of learned helplessness links helplessness with attribution theory (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale, 1978). This theme of uncontrollability is also woven through the work of Eric Fromm (1972) – "perceptions of powerlessness" lead to the "bored character". This person lacks any profound interest in people and job demands as a result of this perceived lack of control.

A variety of environmental factors particular to the milieu of higher education may contribute to learned helplessness responses among professors.

High achieving individuals accustomed to considerable influence in their environment may, by virtue of pressures and changes which they are increasingly unable to control, be more likely to evidence helplessness-related responses. People attribute perceived noncontingency, and the resulting helplessness, to a cause. This cause can be internal or external, specific or global, stable or unstable. This hypothesis can suggest, depending on the perceived source of uncontrollability, whether helplessness will be chronic or acute, pervasive or focused, and whether self-esteem will be lowered.

Table I conceptualizes the hypothesis. This hypothesis is the basis for the career stress model proposed in this paper. The model would suggest that perceived causes, or attributions, are directly related to felt-stress. Attributions to global factors suggest the expectation will persist even when the situation changes. Attributions to specific factors predict changes in expectation may accompany changes in the situation. Internal and external attributions draw upon the locus of control literature (Rotter, 1975). Internal perceptions involve expectations within the person and external perceptions involve environmental, outside-of-person, expectations. An attribution to stable factors suggests the expectation will carry across considerable time, while attributions to unstable factors indicate the expectation need not persist over time. It is important to note that each of these three dimensions is a continuum even though in this discussion they may seem to be treated as dichotomous entities.

TABLE I. PERCEIVED CAUSES, OR ATTRIBUTIONS, OF CAREER STRESS: DIMENSIONS AND CONSEQUENCES [1]



ATTRIBUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES

Chronicity (Time)	Generality (Transferability)	Self-Esteem (Personal Impact)
Chronic	General	Lowered self-esteem
	General	Lowered self-esteem
Chronic	General	
	General	
Chronic		Lowered self-esteem
		Lowered self-esteem
Chronic		

1. Bumpus (1981) (as adapted from Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978)

Support for the reformulated hypothsis has taken several directions. As a model of depression the intensity, chronicity, and generality of helplessness are hypothesized to be the result of the person's tendency to make internal, stable, and global attributions for unpleasant uncontrollable events. Some recent studies find that nondepressive persons make specific, external, and unstable attributions for uncontrollable events while, as predicted by the model, depressive persons make internal, stable and global attributions for uncontrollable events (Raps, Peterson, Peterson, Reinhard, Abramson, & Seligman, 1982; Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & vonBaeyer, 1979).

This hypothesis is also a predictor of performance deficits in that subjects making global attributions for uncontrollable events would be predicted to respond at lowered levels of performance. This prediction is supported by Pasahow (1980) who provided experimental data from task settings in which subjects making global attributions did, indeed, experience significant reductions of performance. And, internal attributions have been shown to enhance affective reactions such as pride of success and shame of failure (Peplau, Russell, & Helm, 1980).

Consider a professor whose sense of vitality and enjoyment in his career is rather low. Within this attribution model there are eight kinds of assumptions he can make about the cause of this lack of vitality (Global-Specific X Internal-External X Stable-Unstable). This array of perceived causes has wide implications for the individual and the probability he will have the necessary belief structure and take the necessary actions to improve vitality.

According to this model, (Table I) if the person makes any of the four global attributions for low vitality, this deficit and the related behaviors will be very general or transferable both across time and various areas of

the person's life. These global attributions suggest to the individual that when he confronts new teaching, research or committee situations, the low vitality outcomes will be just as he has experienced in the past. Global factors predict the expectation of, for example, low vitality to recur even when new academic situations arise. Attributions to specific factors predict the expectation for future career malaise need not recur when the situation changes.

The four internal attributions for low vitality would attribute causal factors to such intra-person dimensions as low ability, limiting personality factors, or inadequate knowledge. These attributions lead directly to lowered self-esteem. External attributions, however, would involve perceived causal elements in environmental factors, like academic climate in the particular department, logical reasons for low gratification from his specific research efforts, or the use of teaching methods which though generating low student interest can nevertheless be fine-tuned into methodologies more rewarding to professor and student alike.

Low vitality attributed to the four stable dimensions involves chronicity. These stable factors imply to the person that he or she will lack the controlling response in the future as well as now. Attributing cause to unstable factors might involve exhaustion, particular time of the year, or the cast of characters with whom the person must work on committee matters this particular academic term.

This model suggests the most insidious set of attributions would be global-internal-stable. Such attributions for the career-weary professor would involve such factors as: (global) "I lack vitality in several areas of my life and teaching, a year from now I will be feeling at least as unfulfilled as I do now"; (internal) "My personality and intellectual

background aren't likely to bring me any ecstasy in teaching"; and (stable) "Since I've felt this way so long, I'm sure these feelings will persist."

Implications of the "Reformulated" Hypothesis of Learned Helplessness

Conceptualizing career pressures with a model of perceived causes (i.e., attributions) for those devitalizing factors has a number of implications. A primary implication involves perceiving those pressures in ways which are not global-internal-stable (i.e. the most negatively-pervasive attribution). Seymour Sarason (1977) has described the academic profession as typifying "one life, one career" perceptions in which the only acceptable career activities are teaching and research. Such perceptions seem clearly to be global-internal-stable expectations about career development and vitality. When that vitality is not experienced could the perceived reasons for that lack of invigoration also be global-internal-stable? Are the same types of attributional processes likely to hold for conceptualizing a lack of vitality in a career as the types of attributions which were operating when entering the career? Rotter's (1975) emphasis on the vulnerability of highly internal people to uncontrollable adjustment factors may be a partial affirmative answer to this question.

Many professors entered their career in the booming expansion of the 1950's and 1960's when mobility, salaries, advancement, and research monies were at their optimistic best. However, the economic, social, and professional factors of the late 1970's and early 1980's have dramatically altered the traditional attitutes and opportunities of the profession. Such unprecedented and major changes may tend to "push" the academic toward global attributions (pervasive perceptions of different areas of the person's life) and stable attributions (the perceived cause will last over considerable

time). Consequently the real world of academic life may come to be experienced as being quite out of tune with the career for which the person prepared. The extent to which this perception is disheartening can be conceptualized by this model -- especially in the case of tenacity of causes which are perceived as global-internal-stable. The literature on learned helplessness and locus of control, cited earlier, which underlie this model would predict resolution would begin as causal perceptions are shifted to any of the other seven attributional categories.

Recommendations

What are some specific steps which could alter these cognitive processes? That is, how can these attributions for decreased career vitality for the professor be moved to viewpoints which do not have the debilitating consequences of global-internal-stable attributions of noncontrollability?

A. As discussed earlier, self-devaluing perceptions form the basis of feelings of learned helplessness or uncontrollability. Why are some professors emotionally strained and others resilient in the face of loss of control over the reinforcements that are significant to the person? Such perceived loss of control may spring from decreased numbers of students enrolling in one's courses, a feeling of malaise about one's discipline, a felt loss of prestige from peers, etc. One answer may be that the professor has experienced a substantial increase in the belief of his or her futility of responding (Miller, Rosellini, & Seligman, 1977). Beck (1974) advocates confronting these perceptions by isolating the assumptions, examining the details in these distorted perceptions, challenging the logic involved, and substituting more realistic belief structures. Individuals with the diverse array of skills represented in the training of professors should have highly probable tendencies to view their potential experience

in optimistic terms. The aesthetic sensitivities, knowledge, interpersonal skills, capacities to carry large tasks through to completion, and verbal and quantitative skills of the professor should be useful in moving to enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy and potential to exercise greater control in one's environment.

The expectation of control is dramatically effective in reducing behavioral and psycho-physiological stress reactions to aversive situations (Wilson, 1979). Langer (1979) has demonstrated that aspects of task devitalization can be reversed by leading experimental subjects to attend to the smaller skills involved in successfully completing the task. Changes can be made in elements of the professor's teacher role such as test design, using non-lecture methods, etc. And alterations can be encouraged in the professor's scholar role such as an invited lecture in a colleague's class, use of the professor's expertise in on-campus consulting, etc. Furniss (1981) and Nelson (1981) provide extensive ideas for steps which would result in reduced sense of helplessness, uncontrollability and greater self-efficacy.

B. "Crises" or states of imbalance in the life of adults can serve as viable bases for future development. Contrary to the notion that crises are destructive, Danish & D'Angelli (1980) contend that crises initiate restructuring processes toward further development. The goal of aiding the academic should be to "enhance or enrich the individual's abilities to deal constructively with these events" (pg. 109). Thus efforts to enhance development should be structured to enable individuals to use crises as opportunities for growth. Such "growth" may be conceptualized as restructured perceptions of "causes", or attributions, of uncontrollability.

C. It is useful to conceptualize the professor as one element of a social matrix. Perhaps a matrix perception of the person's career experience is useful. Sarason (1980) stresses the inadequacy of "individual psychology" (or intrapsychic supremacy) to explain and deal with adulthood. Freud, Piaget and the Gestaltists draw so much attention to the individual that the existence of external social structures and linkages is missed. Organization of the social/organizational structure is frequently ignored. In the process of becoming an adult the person is more aware of the structure, organization, or social matrix in which they are imbedded. Altered perceptions of that structure can be a useful starting point in addressing career stress.

D. One major lesson of the adult development literature (e.g. Levinson, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978) is that times of satisfaction and stress are predictable in terms of various career or life stages. A clear understanding is needed by an academician of the ways personal stress is predictable given the person's career stage, shared by peers in the same stage, and resolvable by options appropriate to that stage. These views would be strong factors in moving the perspectives from global to specific attributions (i.e. relative to a particular career stage). Each career stage represents unique opportunities, needs, and possibilities for resolution of career stress.

E. Institutional policies could be examined in view of this attributional model. To what extent do policies/practices/administrative "positions" reinforce the global-internal-stable perceptions of the faculty member suffering a degree of career malaise? A number of policy areas which would encourage any of the other seven, less restrictive, attributions would include: early retirement, employment after retirement, leaves without

pay, recommending mandatory sabbaticals, employing professors in non-teaching support areas, off-campus consulting, summer internships, etc. A professor with a global-internal-stable perception of career dissatisfaction would be most unlikely to exert the initiative to obtain a sabbatical.

F. A number of institutions have utilized "growth contracting" or "professional development plans" (E.R.I.C., 1981). Funding is made available for support of professional and/or personal enhancement of the faculty member. The possible uses of the money are practically unrestricted. Restrictions are placed, however, on the application process. The professor must construct a rather complete plan for the up-coming year of professional growth based on an assessment of relevant personal and professional dimensions. This assessment must come substantially out of interaction with a group of colleagues, selected by the person, acting as a supportive, advisory, resource. This feedback from self-selected colleagues would be a potent source of input in altering negative attributions. Note from Table I that specific-external-unstable attributions would likely have the fewest negative consequences. An example would be "I am not feeling as fulfilled as I'd like due to limited (specific) factors in my environment (external) which are changeable (unstable)." The encouragement of colleagues and the 'carrot' of financing would tend to give such planning process the force of moving attributions to this more optimistic view of "Why am I unfilled in my job?"

G. Regular meetings with a sensitive department chairman may provide the supportive interaction to examine concerns about what could be happening to enhance the professor's gratification from the work setting. This focus would likely draw the person to consider more specific ("What can we do?") attributions and external ("Can the work setting be changed?") attributions for dealing with staleness.

H. Perceptions can also be altered by utilizing small groups of faculty to explore needs, options, resources, etc. related to career enhancing options. Such experiences may draw perceptions to specific-external views.

There are many options for exploration in group settings which would likely point to more facilitative attributions. Such options would include seeking some change in the current setting: teaching new courses (perhaps from a minor area in the person's PhD work), consulting on campus, assuming administrative responsibilities, taking a leave of absence, moving to part-time work in the institution and part-time off-campus employment.

I. Colleagues and administrators can encourage a fundamental view of the academic career as based on intellectual qualities (analytic, aesthetic, verbal, quantitative, theoretical, etc.). These qualities are readily needed for work in business, government, the clergy, as well as the university. The bed-rock assumption that the PhD is qualified only to work in the academic setting would clearly encourage the detrimental global-internal-stable attributions for career stress. "The college is the only place I can work (global) because, afterall, I'm a PhD (internal), consequently, any change in work setting or style is really unlikely (stable)."

J. Todd Furniss (1981) has provided an insightful work, Reshaping Faculty Careers, which is based on a frequently unexamined premise,

> ". . . that faculty members individually and as representatives of a profession are almost by definition bright and competent. This statement is insured by the processes of training and selection. If at some point in

> their careers they do not seem to show the ability and talent they had when they entered the profession, it is worth looking at the environment to see where it might be altered so as again to give them the chance to shine."(p. xiv)

It may also be useful to examine the professor's belief system (attributions) surrounding these situations. Resolution can result from changes in altered perceptions perhaps as well as in altered environment.

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